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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the traditional role of school counselor and that of the organizational specialist could be made to fit into a single job description that should be the emerging role of the counselor of tomorrow. Rather than viewing the role of organizational specialist as still another expectation, the authors see it as a natural fit between the preventive approach to mental health and a system orientation to human behavior. They contend that counselors should modify their targets to improvements in organizational and interpersonal processes and should act more as consultants either as a group process expert within a single building, or as a member of a districtwide cadre of organization development consultants. (Author/DN)

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THE COUNSELOR CONSULTANT AS A SPECIALIST IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

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"The number of persons presently afflicted with some form of mental disorder may be as high as one in three(Wechsler, Solomon, & Kramer 1970, p. 3)." If we add to this calculation another large number of "normal" people who lack positive mental health (Jahoda 1958), the social problem of a lack of psychological well-being becomes staggering. Since school counselors have emphasized the mental health area as their primary province, it is natural to think of them as being associated with this social problem. At the same time, it seems that the counselor's lack of success in dealing with student mental health is due to the overwhelming challenges he faces. Not only are counselors overloaded with students who need help, but they are expected to work effectively in the midst of outrageously conflicting expectations from students, colleagues, and administrators. Counselors are expected to act on the same day as a sympathetic listener, disciplinarian, friend, coordinator, trouble-shooter, and public relations officer. This inevitably leads to personal role conceptions that are fragmented, inconsistent, and full of confusion, and reduces the interpersonal effectiveness of the counselor.

In the face of such impossible working conditions, what is the school counselor to do? We believe that a radical change in role is needed. Not only is there a great need for more consistency in what the counselor does, but the counselor should focus his mental health work differently. The change should involve moving away from attempts to improve the mental health of individual students

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through counseling toward attempts to improve the climate of the school organization by consulting with all members of the school. In short, he would become a specialist in organization development.[1]

The organizational specialist considers a student's emotional problems to be due primarily to his reactions to the school as a human (or inhumane) culture. Referring a student to the counselor currently implies that the student is not adjusting to the school culture and that he should change his behavior appropriately. The traditional counselor is charged with helping the student to adjust to the school as it now exists. In contrast, the organizational specialist views the school as having organizational problems. He takes the position that personal, emotional problems are strongly influenced by interpersonal environments and that the interpersonal relationships of the staff and student peer groups represent especially potent environments for students. He queries, "What are the deficiencies in the interpersonal dynamics of the school?" before he asks, "What is psychologically wrong with this student?"

Unlike one-to-one or small group counseling relationships, the organizational specialist works with all members of the school or at least with key subsystems of the school such as grade levels, classroom groups, or the student government. Instead of reacting to individual disturbances as they arise, the organizational specialists initiates diagnostic meetings and training sessions when he believes the organization needs to change itself. The energy that counselors spend on a few students is used instead to work with large groups of students and staff. Recent applications of training in organization development indicate that it can indeed have salutary effects on both the adult staff and the student peer

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[1]This article omits much of the theory and practice (as well as research) of organization development. For more information about organization development in schools, the interested reader should look at Schmuck and Runkel (1970), Schmuck and Miles (1971), and Schmuck, Runkel, Saturen, Martell, and Derr (1972).

culture (Bigelow 1971). It is legitimate to say that the new role of organizational specialist can help schools to develop more emotionally supportive climates for working and learning.

How Training in Organization Development Works

Training in organization development aims at improving communication among administrators, teachers, and students, at making their respective resources more available, and at increasing their effectiveness in collaborative problem solving. It strives to help the members of a school develop the skills, norms, roles, procedures, and group structures that will enable them to change their modes of operating in order to cope [illegible]ively with changing environments. Specifically, the objectives or organization development training include: increasing understanding within the school of how the different participants affect one another; establishing clear ways of defining goals and of assessing goal achievement; uncovering organizational conflicts and confusions so that they can be dealt with constructively; improving the group procedures used at large meetings; introducing new procedures for effective problem solving in small groups; and involving more participants at all levels in decision making.

There are five central assumptions and principles that guide the work of the organization development specialist. First, the organization development training will be more effective if it is carried out with all the members of a working subsystem (an organizational family) rather than with individuals who do not work together closely. We assume that since role-taking in the school is done in interaction with others, changes in a school's procedures will be brought about as the training offers new ways for the role-takers to act in relation to one another. Thus by being trained together the participants can see that their colleagues are accepting the new patterns of behavior and are acting upon them.

Second, the organization development consultation should generate valid data

for the members of the school to use in understanding their functioning. This data, along with the specialists' observations, should offer a mirror that the trainees can look into to see themselves clearly as a group.

Third, discrepancies between current performance and the goal achievement of a school can be used as leverage points for change. The dissonance experienced by falling short of objectives can motivate participants to become involved in changing their modes of operating.

Fourth, the organization development training should make available the resources that already exist within and between the members for problem solving and innovation. In other words, the consultation should help participants to conceive of a number of alternatives for future functioning and a number of ways of putting some of the alternatives into action.

Fifth, the organization development specialist will have a higher likelihood of being objective and neutral as a consultant if he is not a member of the subsystem being trained and if he works as part of a consulting team rather than alone.

The Counselor as an Organizational Specialist

The counselor can perform his role as an organizational specialist either as a group process consultant within his own building or as a member of an external team of organization development consultants.

The internal process consultant. There are primarily three ways in which a counselor, performing as an organizational specialist, can strengthen the organizational development of his own school. All three of these types of consultation share some of the benefits of acting as an external consultant because they involve serving as an objective third-party consultant.

1. Consulting with staff groups. The counselor as a process consultant during faculty meetings observes the group in action, gives it feedback on how it is functioning, helps the group to check out how the members feel, and leads

the group in discussions about its norms and methods of operating. He encourages the airing of problems and conflicts that would probably remain hidden; he helps the group to discuss its communication patterns, problem solving competencies, and decision making procedures. Perhaps most importantly, the process consultant teaches members to share in these diagnoses and helps them to discuss their own processes even when he is not present. (For elaboration on these points, and for several examples of procedures for uncovering problems in meetings, see Chapter 6 of Schmuck, Runkel, Saturen, Martell, and Derr (1972).)

2. Consulting with classroom groups. Another way that the counselor can help to improve his school's interpersonal processes is to serve as a consultant to classroom groups. In this sort of consultation, the client is the entire learning group (not just the teacher) and the target is to improve the climate of the group. By employing such training techniques as observation and feedback, communication skills, simulations and games, and innovative group procedures, the consultant strives to help the class improve on group issues such as influence, attraction, norms, communication, and cohesiveness.

This definition of a positive classroom climate from Schmuck and Schmuck (1971) describes the kind of goals the counselor as a classroom consultant is after:

> A positive classroom climate is one in which the students share high amounts of potential influence--both with one another and with the teacher; where high levels of attraction exist for the group as a whole and between classmates; where norms are supportive for getting academic work done, as well as for maximizing individual differences; where communication is open and featured by dialogue; and where the processes of working and developing together as a group are considered relevant in themselves for study (p. 18).

(For more information about working with classroom groups, see Schmuck and Schmuck (1971).)

3. Consulting with school groups. Most consultation to improve the system functioning of schools to date has been aimed either at the staff or classroom levels. There is now considerable interest in bringing students and teachers into more effective collaboration, especially concerning the development of educational alternatives and individualization.

The external organization development team. Another way in which a counselor can perform as an organizational specialist is as the member of a consulting team which intervenes in another school in the district. Cadres of organizational specialists can be formed within districts to conduct organization development training throughout the district. Such cadres can be constituted not only of counselors but also of teachers, principals, curriculum specialists, school psychologists, and assistant superintendents. Each cadre member receives training in such substantive topics as communication, effective meetings, conflict and interdependence, problem solving, and decision making, as well as a supervised practicum and lengthy training in the theory and techniques of organization development. Counselors clearly bring special and unique skills to the cadre. Their knowledge of social psychology and group dynamics, previous roles as third party links between teachers and students, and skills in interpersonal communication and conflict contribute significantly to the resources of the cadres. (For detailed reports on cadres of organization development specialists, see Schmuck and Runkel (1971) and Wyant (1972).)

Example of Counselor as Internal Process Consultant

The following hypothetical example denotes some typical actions that the counselor might take as an internal process consultant:

1. The counselor senses considerable force and irritation behind some referrals from the sixth grade teachers about student vandalism around the school. The counselor interprets these referrals as indicating an organizational problem

involving the fifth and sixth grades rather than a disciplinary issue involving only a handful of students.

2. In starting the consultation, the counselor interviews the fifth and sixth grade teachers, several students, the principal, and even one cook and the custodian to assess the nature and magnitude of the problem of vandalism.

3. Next the counselor puts together a planning committee made up of some fifth and sixth grade teachers and students and the custodian (who the counselor has discovered is involved in the problem). This group helps the counselor plan some steps for working both with sixth grade classes and their teachers on the vandalism problem.

4. The planning group establishes an informal contract with the sixth grade classes having to do with goals of the consultation, procedures, times, etc. In turn, this contract is approved (or rejected) by the sixth grade teachers and students.

5. Next the counselor collects more diagnostic data from the sixth grade classes. He observes a few of their class sessions and interviews an assortment of the class members.

6. A two-day training session is scheduled for the sixth grade classes. The training involves communication skills, improving group functioning, uncovering conflicts, and feeding back data collected previously. The counselor leads the classes through exercises and procedures to improve their interpersonal relations.

7. On the last half-day of the training, the classes move through a problem solving sequence that helps to define the situation (the nature of the vandalism), to delineate the objectives, and to generate several proposals for action.

8. The counselor initiates a half-day follow-up session with the sixth grade classes to determine if the proposals are being tried and to build some agreements for working on similar problems in the future.

Major Stages of Organization Development

Organization development consultants typically proceed through three major stages:

1. Improving communication skills through simulation. The specialists build increased openness and ease of interpersonal communication among the trainees by using simulations of typical school situations to train them in such communication skills as paraphrasing, describing behavior, describing their own feelings, checking their impressions of others' feelings, taking a survey, and giving and receiving feedback.

2. Changing norms through problem solving. After the specialists help the participants to identify their most central organizational problems, they present a sequence of problem solving. By using real school problems, they help the participants to proceed through the steps of problem solving in an orderly fashion.

3. Structural changes through group agreements. The specialists help the participants to transform the results of their problem solving into new functions, roles, and procedures. These new organizational patterns can be formally decided upon by the participants, and agreements can be made about the action steps for carrying them out. Some structural changes might include a faculty senate with well-defined decision making powers, some procedures for teachers and students regularly giving feedback to one another about teaching, and some new teamwork procedures for helping students with special problems.

Summary

Counselors are trapped in a professional situation very much analogous to the knight who jumped on his horse to ride off in all directions. The multiple demands and confusing expectations of counselors need to be reexamined. Rather than viewing the role of organizational specialist as still another expectation, we see it as a natural fit between the preventive approach to mental health and a systems orientation to human behavior. Counselors should modify their targets to improvements in organizational and interpersonal processes and should act more as consultants either as a group process expert within a single building or as a member of a district wide cadre of organization development consultants. The traditional role of counselor and that of the organizational specialist can be made to fit into a single job description that we believe should be the emerging role of the counselor of tomorrow.

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